PROVERBS 8:12

Cornelius a Lapide

I WISDOM DWELL IN COUNSEL,
AND AM PRESENT IN LEARNED THOUGHTS.

"Learned," that is, wise and prudent—namely, honorable, devout, and holy. For, as I said at the beginning, wisdom—that is, uprightness and virtue—is called in this book now doctrine, now understanding, now learning, now knowledge, now discipline, and so forth.

Thus far Wisdom has commended herself and awakened in her hearers a desire for her; now she shows those who desire her the place and house where she dwells, so that they may make their way to her and there come to possess her. She therefore says: "I, wisdom, dwell in counsel." The Hebrew is orma, that is, "in prudence," "with prudence," or simply "prudence," as Symmachus renders it; for it can be translated in all these ways. By prudence understand caution, skill, counsel, circumspection, and foresight, as I said at chapter 1, verse 4. Hence the Septuagint renders it: "I, wisdom, have made counsel my dwelling"; Pagninus: "I have dwelt with prudence"; the Zurich version: "I dwell together with skill"—as though to say, "Skill never deserts me," says Vatablus. Aben Ezra says: "Wisdom has need of skill, without which it cannot subsist"; or, as though she said: "I, wisdom, am skilled and possess a thorough knowledge of prudence, as though I had my station in its very center; I even descend to the utmost reach of knowledge belonging to every skillful thought." The sense, therefore, is: Whoever desire me and seek the place of my dwelling, go to the house of prudence—or skill—and counsel. There you will hear me teaching; for there is my throne, there I am present; indeed, I sit as queen and presiding ruler, so that I may direct and govern all things deliberately, skillfully, circumspectly, and wisely.

Hence, explaining this office of hers, she adds: "And I am present among learned thoughts." I am present as a presiding ruler—that is, I preside. Thus Seneca says: "If we were convinced that God presides over us and is present with us." It is as though Wisdom said: I am she who directs all wise, honorable, and holy thoughts, words, and actions; indeed, I suggest, recommend, and command them. The Hebrew is: "I find the knowledge of thoughts," that is, as Vatablus explains: "I alone discover good and holy thoughts." For I preside over all counsel, all uprightness, and all virtue; indeed, I am their

teacher and lawgiver. Hence the Septuagint says: “I invoked knowledge and thought,” that is, I called them forth, drew them out of my mind, and produced them. The Syriac says: “I created prudence and knowledge, and I acquire counsel”; the Chaldean: “I find”; Rabbi Solomon: “I dwell beside skill.” For, he says, when someone is endowed with knowledge of the Law, he will be imbued with skill and acuteness concerning all things. Wisdom therefore dwells in counsel because she dwells in the heart of the wise and just man, where sound and upright counsels are devised, so that she may arouse and further them.

Moreover, the author of the Greek Catena says: “By sound counsel he here indicates the will’s choice concerning expiatory actions; but by thought and knowledge, an exact consideration of other matters.” And shortly afterward: “Indeed, here—namely, in meditation upon heavenly things—I dwell as in my own proper seat; but there—namely, in the consideration of external things—I dwell as in tents.” The counterpart in Christ, who is Wisdom incarnate, to Solomon’s saying is: “Where two or three are gathered together in my name”—to discuss Christian and honorable matters and the things that belong to Christ—“there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). And likewise: “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him” (John 14:23).

The ancient codices read: “I dwell in the council,” which comes to the same thing; for in the council of wise senators, counsel is considered and flourishes. Hence Cicero, treating of the senate and a senatorial decree in Book III of On the Laws, says: “Three things are commanded of a senator: that he be present, for the matter possesses dignity when the order is well attended; that he speak in his proper place, that is, when asked; and that he speak with measure, lest he be endless.” Rabbi Levi seems to refer these words to schools and academies, for he explains them thus: “I, wisdom, inhabit those places in which skill is found, together with the methods of study—that is, the order prescribed by Logic.” More fittingly, you may refer them to Synods, to conferences of the Fathers, and so forth.

Mystically, these words aptly agree with the Blessed Virgin. First, because she presides over councils and devout congregations erected in her name and honor. From them an admirable fruit overflows into the whole Church; indeed, experience teaches that through these assemblies the orthodox faith has been restored in many places, ancestral piety revived, and zeal and eagerness for every good work enkindled. This is evident from the Confraternity of the Rosary, which Saint Dominic, founder of the Order of Preachers, instituted at

the command of the Blessed Virgin. Through it he accomplished wonders among every class of men for the glory of God, and continues even now to accomplish them through the members of his Order. At Rome, in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, a most illustrious confraternity, commonly called that of the Gonfalone, was established. It traces its foundation to Saint Bonaventure, through whose efforts the City, harassed by the ambitions of certain men, was restored to its splendor in the time of Clement VI, in the Jubilee year 1350. For more concerning the establishment, practice, fruit, number, and splendor of the Blessed Virgin's confraternities, see our Father Antonius Spinella in his Mariale, chapter 40.

Secondly, the Blessed Virgin presides over holy thoughts and counsels concerning the amendment of life, the embracing of a holy state of life, the adoption of the evangelical counsels, the entering upon the way of perfection, and the pursuit of heroic acts of virtue.

I am an eyewitness of this. For twenty years ago, when I was serving as confessor in the church of the Blessed Virgin of Montaigu near Louvain, and was hearing the confessions of pilgrims who flocked there daily in companies by the hundreds—indeed, by the thousands—many communicated to me their resolutions and vows of virtue, to be carried out through the Blessed Virgin. One repeatedly said that he had undertaken this pilgrimage in order to consult the Blessed Virgin about the state of life he should embrace. Another came to offer and dedicate his virginity to her; another, to enter the religious life; another, to seek from the Blessed Virgin a remedy for scruples and other temptations; another, to emerge from the rough places of disordered loves and sins; another, to accomplish some heroic work; another, to settle disputes and quarrels by the help and guidance of the Blessed Virgin; and so forth. They affirmed that they approached her devoutly and offered their vows to her. On Montaigu, therefore, as though from a lofty summit—as verse 2 says—the Mother of God cries aloud and calls everyone to herself, that she may teach and suggest sound counsels of every kind of uprightness. See our Jerome Platus, Book I, On the Good of the Religious State, chapter 24. There he shows that the Blessed Virgin was the first of all to lead the religious life in poverty, chastity, and obedience and gave its example to posterity; and therefore she embraces both all religious Orders and every individual religious with special care and love. Indeed, she herself called all the Orders into being. He demonstrates this by name from their chronicles concerning the Carthusians, Carmelites, Dominicans, Franciscans, Olivetans, Hieronymites, and the Society of Jesus.

Thirdly, the Blessed Virgin presides over learned men and over every kind of learning. Saint Gregory the Wonderworker, Bishop of

Neocæsarea, who instructed Saint Macrina—and through her Saint Basil—in faith and piety, was himself taught, at the Blessed Virgin's command, by Saint John the Apostle. Appearing to him in a vision, Saint John handed him a Creed, by whose help he and his people remained untouched by every error of Arius and the other heretics, as Saint Gregory of Nyssa relates in his Life. She not only taught but also armed Saint Cyril against Nestorius, who taught that the Blessed Virgin was Mother of Christ but not Mother of God; and she brought it about that Nestorius's blasphemous tongue rotted and that he miserably breathed forth his unhappy soul. She instructed Saint John Damascene against Copronymus, Leo the Isaurian, and the other iconoclasts, so that he might overcome them. She trained Saint Dominic against the Albigensians and brought it about that he and his followers destroyed the heresy. Hence the Church's celebrated praise in the Office of the Mother of God: "Rejoice, O Virgin Mary; thou alone hast destroyed all heresies throughout the world." I pass over Rupert, Abbot of Deutz, Albert the Great, Herman the Lame the Count, and many others who, though of unrefined ability, obtained through the Virgin keenness of mind and even distinguished proficiency in philosophy, Sacred Scripture, theology, and the other sciences.

Finally, Saint Ambrose, speaking of the Mother of God in Book I, chapter 7, On the Instruction of a Virgin, says: "She was afterward entrusted to John the Evangelist, who knew not marriage. Hence it is no wonder that he spoke divine mysteries above the others, since the court of heavenly mysteries stood beside him." And Rupert, in Book I on the Canticle, says: "Surely thou hadst to be the teacher of those who discern these things, O blessed Mary, and the teacher of the teachers—that is, of the Apostles—according to the words: 'A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, which flow continually from Lebanon.'"

Tropologically, learn here that it is most profitable to think, read, hear, and speak learned—that is, honorable and holy—things. Into such thought, reading, and conversation, as things pertaining to herself, Wisdom—namely, God Himself—enters and mingles herself. She therefore advances, increases, and perfects it by the lights she sends into the intellect and the holy impulses she breathes into the will. Thus Christ Himself joined the disciples as they went to Emmaus and spoke of Christ's death, and showed them His resurrection and glory (Luke 24). Thus Saint Anthony, hearing it read in church, "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor," meditated upon it, bade farewell to the world, and consecrated himself wholly to God in the monastic life. By the same sentence and in the same way, Saint Francis was led from secular

society to the pursuit of the perfect life. Likewise Saint Augustine, hearing from Pontitianus the life of Saint Anthony and pondering it, turned himself to continence—indeed, to the imitation of Saint Anthony—as he himself relates in Book VIII of the Confessions, chapters 6 and 7. Thus Saint Simeon Stylites, pondering what he had heard read at Mass—"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"—not only embraced evangelical poverty but also ascended a pillar as though he were about to climb to heaven. Thus Saint John Colombini, reading and carefully weighing the life of Saint Mary of Egypt, not only devoted himself to the perfect life but also founded the Order of the Jesuates. Thus Saint Ignatius, founder of our Society, was converted from the world to God while lying in bed with a wound, repeatedly reading and turning over in his mind the lives and heroic deeds of the Saints.